

What to expect from your doctor when you have a cosmetic procedure





This guide outlines what to expect when you see a doctor for a cosmetic procedure. It does not cover cosmetic procedures performed by other professionals – just doctors.



The guide is for procedures that improve your appearance and self-esteem. It does not cover procedures that improve your physical health and safety in other ways. For example, it does not cover mole removal where this is done because of the threat of skin cancer.



Q. WHAT ARE COSMETIC PROCEDURES?

A. *We define “cosmetic procedures” as:*

“Operations and other procedures that revise or change the appearance, colour, texture, structure or position of normal bodily features with the sole intention of improving the patient’s appearance or self-esteem.”

Q. WHO CAN PERFORM COSMETIC PROCEDURES?

A. *In New Zealand, only doctors who have the appropriate training, expertise and experience should perform cosmetic procedures. They must be able to deal with all routine aspects of care and any likely complications.*

The Medical Council has categorised cosmetic procedures according to their level of risk and complexity. The different procedures, and the doctors who can perform them, are discussed more on pages 6 and 7 of this guide.

Q. IS MY DOCTOR QUALIFIED TO PERFORM COSMETIC PROCEDURES?

A. *To check your doctor's qualifications, visit the Medical Council website at www.mcnz.org.nz.*

- Click on the button "Find a registered doctor".
- Type in your doctor's last name.
- Select his or her name from the list to see his or her qualifications.
- Click on the "+" signs next to the heading "qualifications" and "vocational scope" for more information.

If the website says that your doctor is "registered within a vocational scope of practice", this means that he or she is a senior doctor, has done advanced training and is registered with the Council as a specialist.

When you click on “vocational scope” you will be given details about what the doctor’s specialty involves. There is no vocational scope of cosmetic surgery or cosmetic medicine.

Some doctors use different titles from the ones the Council uses. He or she might use a title like “cosmetic surgeon” or “appearance medicine specialist”. These doctors may have had some additional training and experience in cosmetic procedures, but often this training is not recognised by the Council. Ask your general practitioner (GP) if you are not sure what type of doctor you should see.

Before you undergo a procedure, ask your doctor what training and experience he or she has had in that particular procedure and how many times he or she has performed the procedure.



Q. WHAT SHOULD I DO BEFORE I HAVE A COSMETIC PROCEDURE?

A. *Understand the risks and have realistic expectations.*

Before you have a cosmetic procedure, be sure to do your homework and think about it carefully. Remember that all cosmetic procedures carry risks, and make sure you have realistic expectations.

Your doctor will:

- discuss and assess your needs and priorities
- consider how effective the treatment options will be for you.

You should:

- listen carefully to your doctor
- thoroughly read any information your doctor provides
- be confident that the procedure is the right choice for you
- get clear information about any potential risks
- get clear information about the likelihood of being scarred, and what your options are if your scars do not heal well
- get clear information about the costs involved
- check with your doctor about his or her policy for refunding deposits if you change your mind before the day of the procedure
- have realistic expectations – remember, advertising and promotional material are designed to show you the best possible outcomes so they can sell you a procedure.

You can ask for more time and more information before deciding. At any point, you can cancel the procedure if you decide that it is not right for you.

A. *Be aware that different procedures have different levels of risk.*

Cosmetic procedures vary in their level of risk and complexity. To help us set standards, we have classified different procedures according to how serious they are, which doctors are qualified to do them and which type of facility provides the best and safest care.

Surgical procedures – category 1

Category 1 procedures are surgical procedures that involve cutting beneath the skin, such as:

- breast enlargement
- breast reduction
- nose surgery
- surgical face lifts
- liposuction.

These procedures:

- are best done in a day procedure centre or hospital, with an anaesthetist present
- generally have a higher risk of major complications
- are usually performed by a plastic and reconstructive surgeon¹ or by another specialist surgeon².

This surgeon must have the necessary training, expertise and experience in the procedure, and his or her competence in the procedure must have been independently assessed.

Some category 1 procedures, like liposuction, may also be performed by a dermatologist³ who has been through an advanced surgical training programme or by another doctor, usually a GP. Generally, a GP can only do this if a surgeon or dermatologist with advanced training is satisfied that the doctor's training is appropriate and that the doctor is competent to perform the procedure.

¹ Plastic and reconstructive surgeons provide care to patients who require the restoration, correction or improvement in the shape and appearance of the body structures that are defective or damaged. The scope includes all aspects of cosmetic surgery.

² Surgeons are doctors who specialise in operations. There are many different types of surgeon and this can be especially confusing. Not all doctors who call themselves "surgeon" actually have their qualifications recognised by the Council. Visit the Council's website and follow the steps outlined on Page 3 to see if your doctor's qualifications have been recognised.

³ Dermatologists are specialists in treating things like skin, hair, nails and fat.

Non-surgical procedures – category 2

Category 2 procedures are non-surgical procedures (although in some cases the skin might be pierced), such as:

- non-surgical varicose vein treatment
- laser skin treatments
- use of lasers to cut the skin
- mole removal for the purposes of appearance
- laser hair removal
- dermabrasion
- chemical peels
- injections
- microsclerotherapy
- hair replacement therapy
- ultrasound guided sclerotherapy
- endovenous laser ablation for vein removal.

These procedures:

- are generally done in a day procedure centre or a doctor's clinic with or without an anaesthetist
- are usually performed by a doctor registered in the vocational scope of general practice or by another doctor registered in a relevant vocational scope of practice (such as a dermatologist). This doctor must have the necessary training, expertise and experience in the procedure being performed, and his or her competence in the procedure must have been independently assessed.

A. Give your informed consent

Legally a doctor cannot perform a procedure until you have given your “informed consent”. When you give your informed consent, you are acknowledging that you are aware of:

- what will happen during the procedure
- all the risks, side effects, benefits and costs of the procedure.

The informed consent process starts with your initial consultation and continues right up to your operation or procedure. You should feel confident that you have all the information you need to be sure that the procedure is right for you. Do not be afraid to ask lots of questions.

You will be asked to give your informed written consent at a consultation before the day of the procedure and you must reconfirm this on the day you have the procedure. Only give your consent once you know about the risks and side effects and are confident that the procedure is right for you.



Q CAN MY DOCTOR SAY “NO” TO A PROCEDURE?

A. *A doctor can say “no” to a procedure if he or she thinks that it is not in your best interests.*

Before you undergo a category 1 cosmetic procedure, your doctor must make sure that your expectations are realistic and that you want the procedure for the right reasons.

If your doctor is concerned about you or the reasons you want treatment, he or she may refer you for psychological evaluation. This is especially important if you want a category 1 procedure.

Q WHAT EXTRA INFORMATION SHOULD I GET BEFORE I HAVE A CATEGORY 1 PROCEDURE?

A. *When you have your first consultation for a category 1 procedure, your doctor must give you the following written information:*

- realistic information about what is involved with the procedure
- the range of possible outcomes and complications (including worst case scenarios)
- the risks associated with the procedure
- recovery times and requirements
- other options
- your rights as a consumer
- how to make a complaint if something goes wrong
- information about his or her qualifications and experience.

There will be a gap of at least seven days between your first consultation for a category 1 procedure and the date you have your procedure. This is to give you a chance to consider all the information you have been given. You can change your mind and cancel the procedure at any time.

If you have any doubts about the procedure, we recommend you discuss them with a different doctor, such as your GP. Your GP can give you an impartial and informed view of the benefits and any likely risks or side effects.



Q WHAT SHOULD THE DOCTOR DO AFTER THE PROCEDURE?

A. *The doctor who operates on you is responsible for all aspects of your care before, during and after your operation. If the doctor does need to get someone else to care for you, he or she should arrange this with you in advance.*

Doctors must perform all surgical procedures in a place where there are backup services in case you have any complications.

After any category 1 procedure, your doctor must give you written information that tells you:

- how to contact him or her, or another doctor who has access to your notes, if you have any complications
- any symptoms you might experience after the operation and what to do about them
- where to go if you experience unusual pain or symptoms
- instructions for any medication and for looking after yourself
- the dates you need to come back for follow-up visits.

The doctor you see for a category 1 cosmetic procedure will ask your permission to keep your GP informed. Your GP looks after your general health and it is important that he or she is aware of anything that might affect your health or other treatments.

Q WHAT IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG?

A. *If you are not happy with the outcome of your procedure.*

Go back to your doctor or get help from a health and disability advocate

If you are not happy with the outcome of your procedure, you can go back to your doctor or get help from a health and disability advocate. You can take a support person with you to your doctor. Advocates can tell you about your rights and help you to make a complaint. Advocacy is a free service provided by the Health and Disability Commissioner. You can contact an advocate by ringing 0800 555 050.

Contact ACC

ACC can provide for treatment, compensation, transport and rehabilitation if you have been injured as the result of a cosmetic procedure. To make an ACC claim, you need to visit a health provider (like a doctor or a physio) who will help you to fill in a claim form.

Complain to the Health and Disability Commissioner

You can make a complaint to the Health and Disability Commissioner. The role of the Commissioner is to “secure the fair, simple, speedy and efficient resolution of complaints”. You can write to the Commissioner at P O Box 1791, Auckland, or phone 0800 11 22 33.

Contact the Medical Council

If you have any concerns about a doctor’s competence, or think he or she is misrepresenting his or her skills in advertising, you should contact the Medical Council. You can write to the Council at P O Box 11649, Wellington 6142, or phone the office on 0800 286 801.

A. *If you are not happy with your care from someone who is not a doctor.*

If you are concerned about the care you have received from someone who is not a doctor, you should:

- contact that person directly
- get advice directly from the organisation which registers that person (for example, the Nursing Council of New Zealand)

or

- contact the Office of the Health and Disability Commissioner on 0800 11 22 33.

OTHER RELEVANT MEDICAL COUNCIL PUBLICATIONS

- Statement on cosmetic procedures (October 2007)
 - You and your doctor (October 2006)
 - Legislative requirements about patient rights and consent (October 2005)
 - Responsibilities in any relationships between doctors and health related commercial organisations (December 2003)
 - Information and consent (April 2002)
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FOR MORE INFORMATION

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia has compiled some other resources that you might find useful. These include a list of frequently asked questions about cosmetic procedures and some pre-procedure check-lists. You can download these by visiting <https://www.cpsbc.ca/cps> and clicking on the link to “public information bulletins”.

THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE MEDICAL COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND IS TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Council has the following key functions:

- registering doctors
- setting standards and guidelines
- recertifying and promoting lifelong learning for doctors
- reviewing practising doctors if there is a concern about performance, professional conduct or health.

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This guide is scheduled for review by June 2013.

Legislative changes may make the guide obsolete before this review date.